



Staff Report

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION ON AUTOMATED RED LIGHT PHOTO ENFORCEMENT

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

Traffic continues to be one of the top issues facing the City of Belmont. In light of increasing traffic volume and limited police resources with which to monitor and regulate it, staff recommends that the City Council consider the installation of automated red light camera enforcement systems at various intersections in the City of Belmont.

Background

Traffic related issues continue to be one of the major concerns of the residents of Belmont. Traffic volume continues to increase while Police Department resources to monitor and regulate traffic have been reduced. Currently, there are two officers assigned to the Traffic Unit as motor officers. Due to staffing issues, frequently one or both of these officers are required to cover a patrol beat, which takes them away from dedicated traffic enforcement.

One of the most hazardous traffic violations is red light running. In 2005 the Belmont Police Department issued 180 citations for 21453(a) CVC – Failure to stop for a red light. 94 (52%) of the violations occurred at the intersection of Ralston Ave & El Camino Real. Currently, this intersection handles approx. 29,000 vehicles per day on Ralston Ave (2002 traffic survey) and approx. 34,000 vehicles per day on El Camino (2004 traffic survey).

During 2005, there were four (4) traffic collisions in the intersection of Ralston Ave & El Camino. Two of the collisions (50%) were as a result of red light violations.

Due to the physical layout of the intersection, monitoring and enforcement of red light violations is difficult and potentially hazardous to the Officer, violator and motoring public.

A second intersection of concern is Ralston Ave & Hiller St. It has a high traffic volume, approx. 32,000 vehicles per day on Ralston Ave (2002 traffic survey) and approx. 2500 vehicles per day on Hiller St (2002 traffic survey). While there were no red light related traffic accidents

in this intersection during 2005, it is the gateway to both the City of Belmont from Highway 101 and also feeds into two residential neighborhoods, Homeview & Sterling Downs. The intersection is also used as a major route for children walking to and from Nesbit Elementary School, which is approx. 2 blocks north.

Automated Red Light Photo Enforcement Systems, also known as red light cameras, have been in use for approx. 40 years. Currently, there are over 80 jurisdictions in California with Automated Red Light Photo Enforcement Systems. Bay Area locations include:

- San Mateo
- Fremont
- Union City
- Berkeley
- Emeryville
- San Leandro
- San Francisco

One of the first red light camera systems in the Bay Area was established in San Francisco, in 1997. A study conducted to evaluate automated enforcement at five intersections in San Francisco showed that in the first six months of the program, there was a 42 percent reduction in the number of red light violations at intersections with automated enforcement. In a separate study conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety in Oxnard, California, in addition to a reduction in red light violations at intersections with automated enforcement, a number of intersections which were not equipped with cameras showed a reduced number of red light violations. This was attributed to a spill over effect from adjacent deployment.

Discussion

Initial research was conducted with the City of San Mateo. San Mateo was the first and is currently the only jurisdiction in San Mateo County to use Automated Red Light Photo Enforcement. San Mateo uses a system manufactured by RedFlex Traffic Systems. San Mateo installed cameras at one intersection, Hillsdale Blvd & Saratoga Dr in 2004. This installation was a success and it was followed by a second camera system at the intersection of Hillsdale Blvd & Norfolk St. A third location is currently under consideration.

San Mateo has a cost neutral contract with RedFlex, which means that the cost of their system is covered by fines collected from violators. While an Automated Red Light Photo Enforcement Program does relieve the work load on field units, there are personnel costs relating to the operation of system. San Mateo's system is supported by a part-time civilian employee and a Traffic Officer, who includes it as part of his regular duties. In Fremont, the entire system (covering 9 intersections) is managed by a dedicated full-time paid civilian employee. Other cities with similar contracts are Capitola, Davis, Gardena, Laguna Woods, Loma Linda, Los

Alamitos, Marysville, Modesto, Paramount, Rocklin, San Leandro, Union City, and Yuba City.

The processing of a violation in San Mateo is as follows. The violation is captured by digital still and video cameras at the intersection. The violation is sent electronically to the vendor who assembles the information. An employee at San Mateo PD logs onto the RedFlex web site and checks for violations. Each violation is reviewed and then either accepted for citation, accepted for nomination (i.e. unable to confirm driver identification) or rejected. If accepted for citation, the vendor notifies the Traffic Division of the San Mateo Superior Court and the driver. Drivers have an opportunity to view the video of their violation at San Mateo PD each Thursday between 1pm and 7pm. Drivers wishing to contest their citation can dispute it through the normal traffic court system as with any other citation.

Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact at this time. Fiscal impact of implementation to be determined if further study is directed by Council.

Public Contact

Posting of the City Council Agenda.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Council direct further study, including discussions with potential vendors, into the exact benefits and costs associated with implementation of an Automated Photo Red Light Enforcement System. Additionally, staff recommends that if approved, Ralston Ave & El Camino or Ralston Ave & Hiller St be considered as potential locations for such a system.

Alternatives

1. Take No Action.
2. Provide Additional Direction.

Attachments

None

Respectfully submitted,

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Chief of Police

Interim City Manager